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ABSTRACT

A review of literature examines how literacy, self, and culture are related. Diverse representations of "self" are explored, as are their interrelationship with language, culture, and history. Realizing the linguistic and philosophical complexities inherent in defining the self, especially its relationship to the written word, attempts are made to untangle the web of constructs and images in which self is expressed and identified, including interpretive conventions, cultural and cognitive frames of mind, and cultural, metaphoric, and symbolic associations. It is concluded that regardless of how people use literacy, it continues to shape how individuals understand themselves, our world, and others, and it contributes to the creation of a culture. Once conceptualized, the "self" becomes embodied in the texts, symbols, and literate practices of a culture, and in reading and interpreting meaning, it is recreated again. (Contains 90 references.) (MSE)

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Literacy, the Self and,Culture: An Inquiry

I beseech You, God, to show my full self to myself.
St. Augustine

It was true that I could hear only my own voice, but my own voice was the voice of the dead, for the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voice of the living.

Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespearean Negotiations

The content of Greenblatt's quote has "traces" from the work of Bakhtin (1981) who postulated that language is never entirely the sole possession of the speaker or writer but is saturated with the "intentions" and meanings of others. The concept of self can also be understood as a "trace," constructed from prior concepts and meanings and "hidden" in intention, language and experience. Therefore, the self is always in the process of being constituted, reclaimed, and discovered and, at times, intentionally concealed, hidden from us by culture, society and individual acts of will. This paper will explore diverse representations of self and their interrelationship with language, culture and history. Realizing the linguistic and philosophical complexities inherent in defining "the self," and especially its relationship to literacy and the written word, the writer will attempt to untangle or deconstruct the web of constructs and images in which the self is expressed and identified. To do so requires that the self is constructed through interpretive conventions and cultural and cognitive frames of mind. Speaking about the self also involves cultural, metaphorical and symbolic associations. Whatever the self is, it appears that we cannot know it apart from how we use language, how we think and believe, and how we choose to express or represent both self and knowledge in written and spoken forms. In the post-Freudian age, language is still the medium through which we catch glimpses of this elusive concept. In

western culture, as Bruner (1991, 1996) and others have pointed out, the self is created with genres, forms of expressions, and discursive and social practices. In addition, the self is a part of a cultural world view, a belief system, and therefore, it is always in flux, subject to the historical and social climate in which it is situated and the cultural and semiotic codes of the society. Palmer (1996), following Sapir's theory on the relationship between language and world view mentions that the self is associated with the use of metaphor and image schemas, and that "people create their world views through performance, practice and discourse and abstract a distillation of world view for presentation in the frames of language" (p. 116). Anthropologists like Geertz (1980; Shweder & LeVine, 1984), Rosaldo (Shweder & LeVine, 1984) and Turner (Turner & Bruner, 1986) have indicated that in non-western cultures the self is often defined through role and performance as well as ritualized practices and interactions. This concept of self is very much at odds with the western notion of self as autonomous, self-contained, and imbued with intentionality. According to Geertz (Shweder & LeVine, 1986), the western concept of the self is unusual in comparison to others in that it postulates a notion of a "person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgement, and action organized in to a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures" (p.126). For example in his study of the Balinese, Geertz (1973) identifies the self as represented in social roles, stylized expressions, symbols, rituals and every day performances. These cultural practices and events are seen as "texts" and are therefore subject to interpretation as is the self. For Geertz (1983) applying the methodology of symbolic interactionism is a way to come to

understand how the "other" experiences events and constructs meanings from the inside, the emic approach to describing culture. In *Local Knowledge* Geertz identifies the blurring of genres as as unique event in the development of modern social thought. He also describes an "ethnography of thinking," which is "an attempt not to exalt diversity but to take it seriously as itself an object of analytical description and interpretive reflection" (p. 154). Because thought is "multiple as product and wondrously singular as process," Geertz contends that social and anthropological theory are implicated in "puzzles of translation," which demands the use of "cultural hermeneutics" or "with how meaning in one system of expression is expressed in another" (p.151). From this theoretical perspective and framework, this paper will examine and discuss relationships between language (literacy), culture and the self.

Marcus and Fischer (1986) identify the theoretical basis of "interpretive anthropology" as operating on two simultaneous levels that "provides accounts of other worlds from the inside and reflects about the epistemological groundings of such accounts." (p. 26). Unfortunately, as an outsider, the participant/observer employs an etic approach based on interpretive strategies and techniques of her community; therefore, identifying self and meaning is always a socially recreated representation made by the observer. This involves the tendency to textualize culture, events and institutions and to apply modes of thinking associated with literacy practices during the act of interpretation; in addition, it is to see and interpret texts and signs everywhere including the interpretation of events and memories in constructing a self. It is worthwhile to quote a passage from Geertz in *Local Knowledge* to explain this interpretive methodological approach:

> The great virtue of the extension of the notion of text beyond things written on paper or carved into stone is that it trains attention on precisely this phenomenon: on how the

> inscription of action is brought about, what its vehicles are and how they work, and on what the fixation of meaning from the flow of events--history from what happened, thought from thinking, culture from behavior--implies for sociological interpretation. To see social institutions, social customs, social changes as in some sense "readable" is to alter our whole sense of what such interpretation is and shift it toward modes of thought rather more familiar to the translator, the exegete, or the iconographer than to the test giver, the factor analyst, or the pollster (p. 31).

In her study of the Phillipine people, the Llongot, Michelle Rosaldo (Shweder & Levine, 1986) noticed that they lacked belief in a subjective self, and intentionality or will, the subjective agencies that westerners associate with the self. What Geertz and Rosaldo identify in their studies of the Balinese and the Llongot are alternative concepts of self and personhood expressed through rituals, events, images, practices, symbols, those textual elements that make a culture or society an artificial construct of signs, codes and forms, which are then open to interpretation. To become fully aware of how others experience themselves and their worlds may be impossible, but metaphors, interpretive conventions and genres may be all we have to know the self at all. In non-western cultures as in the west, the concept of self remains problematic and elusive and it may be only through analyzing cross-cultural concepts that we may begin to construct a valid representation. This may allow for what Marcus and Fischer (1986) refer to as "defamiliarization by epistemological critique" that is "going to the periphery to bring insights on the periphery back to the center to offset settled ways of thinking and conceptualization." (p. 137) The theoretical perspectives of the new literacy studies utilize a similar methodology by juxtaposing non-western cultural concepts and values against western versions during the acquisition of literacy (this will

be addressed in the latter part of the paper). The concept of self is primarily created through written and spoken forms and genres that change over time. The self, therefore, is an integral part of the literate practices of the community and culture, at once an abstraction and simultaneously expressed in concrete spoken and written performances and acts , which must be interpreted and understood using the conventions and genres of the culture, community, or society.

Western literary critics and historians have identified the changing nature of the self embodied in literary texts and periods. In his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt, a founder of new historicism, explored the concept of self in his study of Elizabethan writers and poets, especially Shakespeare. He analyzed how these writers began to formulate a representation of an interior self or consciousness, to engage in an act of "self-fashioning." According to Greenblatt, prior to this period the language to express this interior self was absent. In order to represent the acts of self-reflection, self-consciousness and to convey the distinction between private and public selves, Elizabethan writers and artists began to use dramatized language, metaphors and symbols to communicate the inner being or consciousness of a interior self. Artists used symbols and allegorical references in their paintings and poets used extended metaphors in poetry to represent acts of self-reflection and knowing. According to Greenblatt, self-fashioning occurs in the work of the writers he studied in many ways including this partial list:

> 2. Self-fashioning for such figures involves submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self--God, a sacred book, an institution such as church, court.
>
> 3. Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other--heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist--must

be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed.

9. Self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language (p.9).

Greenblatt also mentions that none of these figures "inherits a title, an ancient family tradition or hierarchal status that might have rooted personal identity in the identity of a clan or caste" (p. 9) In *Metaphors of Self* James Olney puts forth a theory of autobiography and states that "study of the self and study of the world cannot be separated" (p. 14) and it is through metaphor that the connection is made as Olney describes:

> Metaphor is essentially a way of knowing..... this is the psychological basis of the metaphorizing process: to grasp the unknown through the known, or to let the known stand for the unknown and thereby fit that into an organized, patterned body of experiential knowledge. A metaphor, then, through which we stamp our own image on the face of nature, allows us to connect the known of ourselves to the unknown of the world, and, making available new relational patterns, it simultaneously organized the self into a new and richer entity; so that the old known self is joined to and transformed into the new, heretofore unknown, self. Metaphor says very little about what the world is, or is like, but a great deal about what I am, or am like, and about what I am becoming; and in the end it connects me more nearly with the deep reaches of myself than with an objective universe. (pp.31-32).

According to Olney, metaphor "mediates between your experience and my experience, between the artist and us, between conscious mind and total being, between a past and present self, between, one might say, ourselves formed and ourselves becoming" (p. 35). It is deeply implicated in spoken and written forms when a self is invented or constructed.

Havelock (Kintgen, Kroll & Rose, 1988) recognized that the ancient Greek writers who were immersed in the oral tradition did not use self-reflexive language that revealed a subjectivity or intentionality as moderns know it; instead, they used concrete language to describe actions in narrativized forms that were contextualized by events, a method that enhanced memorization and the oral transmission of the work. In explaining the oral tradition, Havelock states that "the speaker and his speech remained one; what was spoken was his creation, in a sense it was himself, and it was difficult to think of this self apart from the words it spoke" (Kintgen et. al, p.134). The use of personal narrative to reflect an "I" and its experience of the world was absent in Greek literature. Olson (1994) tells us that "Homeric folk psychology" was unlike ours in that "it lacked a vocabulary and its corresponding concepts for thinking about the mind" and that "representing one's thoughts and actions as originating other than in the self indicates a limited notion of responsibility, deliberateness, and intentionality" (p. 240). Olson (1994) also states that "Homeric Greeks experienced or represented speaking, thinking, feeling, and acting as originating outside the self, typically in the speech of the gods: they "had to" act rather than "decide to" act" (p.242). However, according to Olson, the classical Greeks, as a result of the advent of writing, began to see the mind as a source of ideas and to witness the occurrence of modern self-consciousness.

With the written word (alphabetic literacy) the concept of the "author" as distinct from the text was created and it problematized meaning and furthered the use of exegesis and the practice of hermeneutics to in order decipher authorial meaning and intentionality. Writing was used on a variety of levels and in many forms and genres such as the allegorical, mythical, and the factual; how it was used dictated how the reader would either interpret, decode or reconstruct the meaning (Olson, 1994). In addition, according to Goody and Watt (Kintgen et. al, 1988,) Ong

(1977, 1982, 1970), Olson (Kintgen et. al, 1988; Olson & Torrance, 1991; 1994; Olson & Torrance, 1996) and others, the written text contributed to the development of rationality, logic and modern science. Also, in the west, written language separated the self from its moorings in the spiritual world and the world of nature (see Olson's *The World on Paper).* In his analysis of the writings of St. Augustine, Brian Stock (Olson & Torrance, 1996) states that for Augustine the concept of self was inseparable from "a series of verbal signs" crafted in narrative (narrativio) and interpreted for significance (significatio) and that for Augustine "the limitations of self-knowledge are accordingly those of language" (p. 53). However, Stock also states that "because words imperfectly express our thoughts and because our thoughts may in turn imperfectly configure interior or exterior realities, our linguistic understanding of the self ....may be incomplete" (p. 53). According to Stock, self-reflection for Augustine was an "ethical activity' and one's narrative was assessed against a master-narrative, a divinely inspired creation manifested in the Bible. The master-narrative can be deciphered and, according to Stock, "self-understanding is an interpretive activity that has much in common with other types of literary exegesis; and selves, to the degree that they are so interpreted, are divisible into genres like types of writing" (p. 54). Even though the self cannot be defined in language it "can nonetheless be made the subject of inquiry like a text that has to be read, understood, interpreted, and reperformed" (p. 54). Stock goes on to say that for Augustine this "narrative theory of self" is "bound up with personality, character, and autobiography" (p. 55). In his analysis of Petrarch, Stock says that Petrarch could not think of the self apart from "the boundaries of its literary associations (p. 56), and unlike Augustine who thought the self may be real and accessible through language, Petrarch, thought the self "could be fully accessible through books but by implication never ontologically real" (p. 56). With Petrarch

self and literary text are united and we have entered a modernist world where hermeneutics is employed to interpret and construct textual meaning and the self. According to Stock, it was Descartes who created a narrative in thought which embodied mental constructs of the world that has resulted in complex and modernist notions of ontology and mind (pp. 56-57). With Descartes the self or mind was the primary source of ideas rather than the external world.

According to Ruqaiya Hasan (Hasan & Williams, 1996) literacy is implicated with the concept of representation; that is reading and writing involve the ability to 'see' a phenomenon as 'standing for' something other than itself and literate practices are "acts of semiosis" (p. 380). Literacy involves the interpretation of signs and the creation of modes of thinking, and it is a medium to identify the representation of the self as it is expressed in language. Literate acts are performances, representations, and texts that are open to interpretation and we can begin to understand how literacy is experienced by the practitioner in creating meaning and self. Jerome Bruner (Olson & Torrance, 1996) believes that all cognition involves representation and that it is "a process of construction" (p. 95) that involves a number of modes of meaning making including the maintenance of *"intersubjectivity"* (p.95) which entails the capacity to "read"other minds. Besides intersubjectivity, the other modes of meaning making that Bruner identifies are the actional, normative, and propositional modes, the first three are involved in the creation of stories or narratives of building "a more structured whole" (p. 97).The use of a narrative genre demands an interpretation and, according to Bruner, genres are modes of thought (p. 98). According to Feldman and Kalmar (Olson & Torrance, 1996) "genre patterns are cognitive models that are derived from exposure to texts that embody them but are then imposed on texts by readers who know them as an interpretive lens" and "They are in the text and in the mind" (pp. 107-108).

Allan Luke, (Hasan & Williams, 1996) following Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, argues that there are "genres of power" and that certain ones are invested with more symbolic value and thus may reward the person or self who uses them with more cultural capital. In addition, certain genres, because they are invested with more social power, reproduce the dominant discourses and further social inequality. Genres are cultural creations or artifacts, social constructions, and are used to interpret and create literate performances and are critical to how the self is presented and interpreted. For example, in addition to "genres of power" certain kinds of genre, such as a spiritual autobiography in the African-American literary tradition allow a writer/reader to transgress social station and oppression and call upon the divine to assist in the act of writing narrative (Bassard, 1992). According to Bassard (1992) this doctrine of "sanctification" is part of a genre that serves as an invocation for the "holy spirit" to enter the speaker or writer and to dwell inward (pp.122-123). According to Bassard "the spiritual autobiographer, while acutely aware of her place in the social order of "the world" feels uniquely free to transgress social definitions of "self" (p. 123).

In an essay "The Invention of Self: Autobiography and its Forms" Jerome Bruner and Susan Weisser (Olson & Torrance, 1991) examine the genre of autobiography as a literary form which allows a writer to give an account of experiences and invent a self. In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986), Bruner had discussed two modes of thinking as critical for interpreting the world: the narrative mode for understanding human actions, "the agentive mode," and the paradigmatic mode for the events in the empirical or mechanical world, "the epistemic mode." In the essay on "self invention" he explores the narrative mode further and proposes that the genre of autobiography turns a life into a "text" that opens it to alternative interpretations and

reconstructions. Using narrative one "reads" or writes one's life as a text or as a performance by interpreting events and memories. Bruner relates that at certain times in one's life one can create a different narrative or interpretation of the same events. In the construction of autobiography "episodic memory" is transmuted through "semantic memory," "a canny act of putting a sampling of episodic memories into a dense matrix of organized and culturally schematized semantic memory" (p. 135). Giving a "self-accounting," making an autobiography, is a major way of constructing meaning from past events" (p. 136) and, according to Bruner, it makes life into a "text" and "it is only by textualization that one can "know" one's life" (p. 136). Bruner goes on to say that "the process of life textualization is a complex one, a never-ending interpretation and reinterpretation. Its textual status is not in the strict sense determined exclusively by acts of speaking and writing, but depends instead upon acts of conceptualization: creating schemata of interpretation by which semantic memory gives coherence to elements of episodic memory. Schematization is guided by rules of genre and cultural convention, which in turn impose rules of linguistic usage and narrative construction" (p.136). In his words, "autobiography forces interpretation" which compels one to engage a choice of genre, style, theme, convention (p.133). Autobiography for Bruner is an act of "self-location" through which "we locate ourselves in the symbolic world of culture" (p.133). While creating a cultural form, a narrative construction also contributes to individuation, what Bruner calls *"agency"*(p. 133). . In using written genres, culture is recreated through stories, and selves are reinvented and reconstructed using the cultural artifacts, symbols and signs to interpret someone's else "text" or self as well as one's own. Thus, self, language and culture are interwoven and integrated in the genres and discourses that are used by a culture to interpret their world and themselves. The most compelling aspect of this for

Bruner is the reflexive act and self-consciousness which "is perhaps the most primitive form of interpretation and may be a component of all other forms of interpretation" (p. 137). In creating or inventing a self there is always the separation between memory events and the interpretation of those events by the narrator and the "self-conscious" imposition of interpretive schemata to create coherence of the "episodic memories" themselves. This interrelationship between narrative construction, story telling, discourse techniques, culture and self is analyzed by James Gee essay (Mitchell and Weiler, 1991) in the essay "The Narrativization of Experience in the Oral Style." Gee discusses how African Americans use the oral strategy of "topic-associating" rather than "topic-centered" discourse strategies while telling a story.

Brian Street (1984, 1993, 1996) and other scholars in new literacy studies argue that western literacy is incorporated by non westerners and given meaning by engaging indigenous cultural, societal and political practices. Cultures impose their schemata on western literacy practices and often through opposition create alternative meanings of western literacy. This is especially true if we examine the literature on the cross-cultural implications of literacy and how it influence the concept of self. For example, Resnick and Resnick (Barnes & Stearns, 1989) have identified how western literacy practices changed during different historical and political eras and how literacy has taken on many diverse meaning and usages. Understanding what literacy means to the actors and performers compels one to enter the fields of social and political history and, according to the Resnicks (1989), it necessitates the "reconstruction of the social, cognitive, and perhaps emotional environment in which reading and writing have been practiced" (Barnes & Stearns, p.172). Echoing Scribner's insight about the social nature of literacy they postulate that literacy is always a "social achievement," integrated with the goals and beliefs of a community or

social organization. What matters also is the social relationship established between readers and writers during literacy transactions and this impacts how texts are produced, meanings mediated and interpretations constructed (pp.174-175). The reader uses her understanding of literate practices, genres and interpretive conventions to create meaning from a written text and it is at this juncture that it might be said that the self becomes the subject of reconstruction or invention. According to the Resnicks, "reading is an interpretive act," and "the reader uses the text to construct meaning" and "does not *take* the meaning from the text or copy the text into memory" (p. 174). In addition, they state that texts and meanings are not fixed but are subject to cultural and social situations:

> A text may be used in different ways by different individuals and by different interpretive communities. Yet each time it is used it must be considered as a new social episode; to understand the episode, we will have to understand the relationship between author and reader *as construed by the reader* in the particular cultural and social space in which the reading takes place." (p.174)

The self during the act of reading becomes an object of consciousness and self-reflection, and is therefore transmuted during the interpretive process. From this perspective, the self is not an abstraction, timeless and universal, but is defined and changed by the interpretive, cultural and social practices of the society or community, and is therefore subject to its norms, and values (Barnes & Stearns, pp 184-185).

Reading "sacred texts' can bind the community and self together, reinforcing beliefs and rituals as well as notions of self and identity, but according to the Resnicks when life's conditions change it may force "noncanonical reinterpretations" (p. 184). The relationship between sacred

texts and self, most notably the old and new testaments, and church philosophers like Augustine has been central to western thought. In an essay heavily influenced by the reader-response theories of Wolfgang Iser, Jonathan Boyarin (1993) describes the dialogic interactions around sacred texts that occur in a yeshiva class during the act of interpreting the Bible or the Talmud. In this setting reading and interpreting is a part of a dynamic tradition and process for recreating meaning and understanding among members of the community. The readers do not see the bible as a "fixed text." According to Boyarin "Questioning--interrogation of the authoritative text--is the essential pattern of Jewish study, along with reflection on the interaction between text and everyday life. It is *traditional* constantly to dispute and recreate what Judaism is; the loss of that capacity reflects in turn a weakening of Jewish tradition" (p. 229). Thus, the self, identity, and tradition are recreated in the interpretive process, and as new interpretations and meanings are constructed the concept of self and tradition changes simultaneously over time.

Cross-cultural studies on the uses of literacy offer a unique opportunity to catch images of self across cultures and to question and interrogate the universalist concept of a timeless, transcultural self. Studies have shown that other cultures use western literacy practices for their own ends and this is often related, as Kulick and Stroud (Street, 1993) show in their study of a Papua New Guinean village, not to "how literacy affects people but how people affect literacy." (p. 31). In many cultures, western literacy practices are integrated into the culture and belief systems of the people and often used to reinforce existing beliefs and practices that promote the society's stability. These practices and uses are not always transparent to westerners who are not able to gain an emic perspective on how non-western peoples "experience" literacy (e.g. cargo cults). The western belief that literacy leads to the creation of an "autonomous self' modeled on

western discursive practices is foreign to many cultures as Geertz's work demonstrates. For example, Kulick and Stroud recognized that after acquiring literacy, village writers and speakers still informed and contextualized their textual meanings within their interpretive framework and the cultural concepts of "hed" (autonomy and willfulness) and "save" (knowledge of social obligations). These paradoxical qualities are how the villagers know the self and play a major role in how social selves interact in the village. For example, as Kulick and Stroud observe, it is important to minimize conflict within the society, and the villagers accomplish this by using a "strategy of rhetorical dissociation" and "by structuring talk so that the speaker both expresses and simultaneously dissociates himself from controversial statements"(p.46). Besides dissociation, indirection is also included in rhetorical strategies. For example, in a speech to the villagers, Kem, one of the most skillful orators in the village, indirectly requests assistance to prepare a feast he is sponsoring. Kem's meanings are "hidden" in speech and contextualized by the cultural beliefs about a how the self should be presented. His real intentions are intuited or interpreted by listeners who know village history and Kem's situation and, therefore, can understand the mutilayeredness of meaning contained in his speech. Kem does not asked directly for help and frames his request by saying "a little problem arose last month" and relating that "sickness has got (my) wife" (p.46). Through the use of indirection and self-effacement in his discourse, Kem suggests that his words originate from a source other than himself. His intentions are "hidden" and the listeners apply interpretive conventions and their knowledge of the context to know what Kem means. Kem's self is embedded in his performance through the integration of the interpretive and rhetorical conventions of literacy with cultural beliefs and this serves to reinvent in this spoken genre what constitutes a self or person to the villagers of Gapun. The

cultural world view of the villagers constrains the literacy transactions and communicative events of the speakers and so it is necessary to translate how language is used to represent the self in this culture.

Gail Weinstein-Shr's (Street, 1993) study of two Hmong refugees in Philadelphia who serves as literacy brokers for the community reveals how an interpretive set of criteria that is associated with literacy can be used to define roles and self. One literacy broker, a young man named Chou Chang, knows English and creates new roles for himself by interpreting and decoding government bureaucratic applications for friends and families so that others could receive financial support. His literacy knowledge is valued by the group and assists members to assimilate and survive in a new society. Pao Youa, an older man who does not speak English, is the cultural and historical gatekeeper to his peoples' past in Laos and the chronicler of events in the United States. He constructs the narrative history of the collective and individual self and preserves tradition; Pao is the storyteller, the interpreter of tradition. In collecting news clippings, scrapbooks, and personal journals, Pao is creating a narrative, giving meaning and significance to the "episodic memories" of his people. In doing so, he provides the "self-accounting" of his people and invents a self as historian and cultural preserver. Even though he does not read or write, Pao's self is related to modes of thinking and interpretive conventions associated with literacy events, while Chou's self-inventing is in his performance as English translator and mediator.

Kathleen Rockhill's (Street, 1993) study of Hispanic women's struggle to attain literacy against the backdrop of strong culturally-defined gender roles examines literacy and self in relationship to the discourses of power and the western belief that literacy leads to freedom.

According to Rockhill, the governmental and school information about literacy attainment and success is constructed on paradigm equating literacy with power, freedom and opportunity, the necessary ingredients to construct a western concept of self. For Hispanic women, as for many immigrants, to learn English is to enter the wider world of freedom, money and liberation. Rockhill reveals that many Hispanic women conduct much of the written literate activity in the home, while men engage in more conversational English outside the home in the public forum. Therefore, literacy practices reinforce gender roles, one associated with the private or domestic feminine sphere and the other with the public or masculine sphere. If Hispanic women were to become more literate and, therefore, more liberated, the Hispanic male as provider would feel threatened, and domestic stability would be undermined. Thus, according to Rockhill, Hispanic women are caught in a dilemma because by learning English and entering the world of the dominant culture and language and achieving economic security, they would simultaneously be giving up their families and their cultural identity, both of which are coded by gender. In this context, literacy contributes to a divided self because of the different cultural beliefs and gender roles associated with it.

The concept of divided self is also present in Greg Sarris' (Boyarin, 1993) study of the internal conflicts that emerge in a Native American community school as a result of a white teacher's desire to integrate Indian myths and values into her curriculum, an ostensibly well-meaning act to reinforce identity and self. However, the students do not respond in a positive way to the curriculum and react with hostility to the teacher. First, the representation of the story of the "Slug Woman" is presented to the students by a white teacher, an "outsider," and, according to Sarris, the other part of the problem is that the teacher mistakenly saw the culture as fixed and

an cultural knowledge shared by all students equally. By assuming this, the teacher had reified culture and myth, threatened the students' self identities, and created anxiety about the real nature of their changing identity in relationship to the dominant culture. The teacher's assumption about a shared cultural tradition, the fact that she was another "outsider" coming into the community, and the fact that the students saw the classroom as a inappropriate place to engage personal experience triggered resentment and hostility. The students had learned correctly from the teacher not to engage the self with the text or with content in the classroom and that "lived experience be kept separate from what is being read, that lived experience be kept outside the classroom" (Boyarin, 258). As Sarris describes it, reading "in terms of the students' cultural and historical community, the classroom environment, and the particular practice of reading in the classroom, separates the students form their ongoing histories and traditions and the processes of identity formation associated with their histories and traditions (pp. 263-264). Thus, in this case, literate practices contribute to create a self that is both fixed and in flux, which provokes anxiety in the students.

For many scholars literacy practices cannot be understood separate form issues of gender, class, political power and the social organization of institutions as Reder and Wikelund's study of the Eskimo fishing village of Seal Bay reveals. Adhering to Scribner and Cole's (Kintgen et. al, 1988) view of literacy as a "set of socially organized practices," the researchers examined how the historical development of literacy practices knowledge of literacies continues to influence its social purposes in the context of church and village and church and school and to reinforce meanings about Inside world of the village and the need to communicate with Outside world. The historical and social identities associated with literacy continues to influence how villagers use

language and view themselves and others. The self is embedded in the very language used to create the social organizations of the village and culture..

Regardless of how we use literacy, it continues to shape how we understand ourselves, our world and others, and it contributes to the creation of a culture. Without language it would be impossible to translate the cultural symbols, forms, genres, codes, and signs and define "the self." Once it is conceptualized the "self" becomes embodied in the texts, symbols and literate practices of a culture, and in reading and interpreting meaning it is recreated once again. In a narrative construction, the self is represented and disentangled momentarily from the cultural and social abstractions of society, and manifested in genres or what Wittgenstein called the "forms of life." As a text, the self becomes a representative map of the culture or society, and to know the culture is to know the self. However, often the self remains concealed from those who are immersed in the culture and language. Ultimately, this ongoing inquiry into the self has special relevance for teachers and students who must examine the concept of self in more depth and understand the complexities involved when teachers ask students to read, write, or interpret texts and do the most difficult task of all: write about themselves, write about the self.

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